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Critics'

THEATRE REVIEWS

1942

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†"Vickie" opened Tuesday, September 22nd, at the Plymouth Theatre.

THEATRE REVIEWS IS A COMPLETE GUIDE AND RECORD TO THE NEW YORK SHOWS

Critics' Theatre Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York papers

NEW YORK SUN
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK JOURNAL AMERICAN

Place this week's reviews with preceding weekly reviews so as to have always an up to date file of the New York Stage.

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"Vickie"

NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM
September 23, 1942

Vickie, S. M. Herzig's Farce, Opens at Plymouth Theater

By JOHN MASON BROWN

THERE were those who laughed at Vickie last night. There were those who laughed right up to the very end. But, though I cheerfully admit that women who insist upon dressing up in uniforms can be at least laughable, I could not find the noontime shadow of a forced smile in S. M. Herzig's wartime farce which strains to make them absurd.

There is a farce, and a good, savage one, in the Penthesileas who, in spite of their architecture, like to strut about like members of the Foreign Legion. Yes, and also in those females who, though medically virginal, victimize their families after having taken a First-Aid Course. Yet by the Nine Gods, which Lars Porsena swore by and in spite of advance reports, Vickie is not that play.

Did Percy Hammond once describe a bad script by saying that in its presence he felt as out of place as an Elk at Oxford? Well, last night at the Plymouth, when confronted by Mr. Herzig's unconscionably bad play, I felt as out of place as an Oxford don among the Elks.

* * *

Mr. Herzig was struggling to relate the difficulties into which a uniformed wife got her poor husband. This husband was an engineer, hoping to interest the government in some plans of military importance, when his three-room suburban apartment was invaded over the week end by an army of uniformed females, a refugee opera singer who had turned up as a cook, and two privates to whom his wife was supposed to act as "Godmother." Needless to say when the big man from Washington came to see the husband's plans, he was mistaken for a spy and badly treated. And all the obvious complications take place.

Badly treated, however, as is the big man from Washington, he is not nearly so badly treated as is the audience or the cast. There are some reliable players on hand—Uta Hagen, Jose Ferrer, Taylor Holmes, Frank Conlan, Charles Halton and Margaret Matzenauer, to be exact. And for them it is as easy to feel sorry as it is to be embarrassed by them.

It is hard to imagine a bigger bore than Vickie. Certainly trying to do so is not fun. But then neither is Vickie, at least as I see it, and nothing could persuade me to see it again.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
September 23, 1942

'Vickie,' Farce About Women, Could Stand a Little First Aid

"Vickie," a farce by S. M. Herzig. Produced by Frank Mandel at the Plymouth Theatre, New York, Sept. 22, 1942.

★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

I DON'T suppose anybody would object very much if some one were to write a real good farce that made sport of ladies in uniform, even in these nervous days, when there isn't anything very funny about anybody who is trying to help with the job in hand.

But "Vickie," at the Plymouth, isn't a good farce. Not to me. And the fun it makes of its ladies in uniform, who might be the WAACS, the WAVES or even the AWVS, is silly fun, dependent on a dozen snappy lines and a half dozen forced situations.

There used to be a rule for farce writers which insisted that if they could make their audiences believe their first acts or even want to believe them, they could be as silly and as extravagant after that as they wanted to be.

If that first act isn't believable, or the people in it acceptably human, it is an almost impossible task for the playwright to stir up the interest in either people or story that humor demands.

Vickie's Adventure

Vickie Roberts of this play is the wife of a young inventor who has been trying to sell a war machine to the Government. Impressed with the efforts to enlist women in war work, she joins a group of emergency godmothers, takes a course in first aid, and starts out to comfort the soldiers.

Her uniformed colleagues are mostly pretty empty heads who couldn't pass a first aid test in any organized community, and the mess they stir up centers about their mistaking a dollar-a-year executive for a spy; their capture and mistreatment of him, and a final application of blackmail that forces him to give a contract to the inventor.

Incidental humor is dependent upon the engagement of the erstwhile popular prima donna, Mme. Margaret Matzenauer, as a singing cook, and the engagement of the faithful Frank Conlan as an air warden who used to be a flagpole sitter and is therefore supposed to be funny sitting in a garden pointing binoculars at the sun.

Good Production

Frank Mandel, the producer, has, I fear, overstayed his time in Hollywood. "Vickie" is in the screen farce, rather than the stage farce, tradition. I wish him luck in its sale to the B-picture people. Last night's audience howled at much of it.

He has staged the piece rather handsomely. Jose Ferrer and Uta Hagen, he a good farceur with the right material, she a capable actress, play the leading couple agreeably.

Taylor Holmes has an indefinite short part. Charles Halton serves dutifully as the mauled victim, and there are Colette Lyons and several other good looking young women to tone up the stage pictures.

Ernest Glover did the sets and Mr. Ferrer helped Mr. Mandel with the direction, which is pretty muddled.

NEW YORK JOURNAL AMERICAN
September 23, 1942

Uta Hagen and Jose Ferrer Appear in Farce by S. M. Herzig

By JOHN ANDERSON

HOPING to ride along, I suppose, on the crest of the WAVES and the WAACS, S. M. Herzig has written a farce called "Vickie" about women in war and war in the home, but it left your play warden at the Plymouth last night A.W.O.L. which, in measly civilian life, means merely Altogether Without Laughter. People around me seemed to be giggling pretty often but I suspected them of tickling one another.

Mr. Herzig has taken material which ought to make a good farce, cooked up a few cockeyed situations, and set down, at suitable intervals, lines which in the riotous abandon of full-speed foolishness should cause spectators to break ribs, split their sides, fall in the aisles and give other symptoms of auditory happiness, and fractured funnybones.

But the play simply doesn't jell. I do not know what you call jelly that hasn't jelled, nor am I sure of all the chemical changes wrought in the process of jelling. I know only that between jelly and non-jelly there is a world of what the comic strips call phooey. There is a world of it in "Vickie."

In farce, of course, it makes no difference how wild or improbable the situation is, as long as it is funny. The rule (which I didn't make up) is that it must then be followed by one funnier, growing out of it, and so on, in increasing momentum and expansion until the stage is engulfed in a tidal wave of nonsense, without reason or repression, mounting, tumbling, and drowning everything in laughter.

When It Misses Fire

If it doesn't do that it may be called a farce, but it has no more relation to the traffic of the stage than an automobile in dead storage has to the traffic on the street. It just doesn't run.

Since the exasperation of an apparently sensible character over the events that surround him is the mainspring of farcical fun Mr. Herzig complies strictly with the specifications when he shows us young George Roberts, studiously inventing some wonderful war apparatus for the Government in his apartment in the New York suburbs.

George's presumably humorous exasperation is due to the somewhat nit wit war activities of his wife, Vickie, as part of some Woman's Auxiliary Corps or something. The girls flaunt themselves around in uniform, hold first aid classes all over George's workroom, and Vickie becomes Emergency Godmother to two uninhibited soldiers whose chief interest is sex.

George also finds an uninvited airplane spotter on his terrace, an old fellow who used to be a flagpole sitter, and one of the Aucks unloads on the desperate pair a refugee, a former opera singer, as a cook.

Mr. Herzig churns all these honestly farcical ingredients up in an orie-eyed plot about the gals trapping a WPB big shot as a spy, just as he was about to buy George's invention for the Government.

Some of the flatness of the effect is undoubtedly due to the direction, done by Jose Ferrer, who has the principal part and Frank Mandel, who produced the show. Mr. Ferrer is an expert farceur as handsomely proved by his uproarious doings in "Charley's Aunt" a couple of seasons back. But unless they were all waiting for laughs they were led to anticipate during the rosy-tinted try-outs, I cannot understand the hesitant pacing, the relaxed tempo of the playing, and the lack of drive in the whole performance. Since the writing has little comic style and not much invention the play stumbles from the outset.

The others in the cast vary considerably. Uta Hagen is a pleasant and talented young actress, but she has no farce style, and Charles Halton and Taylor Holmes, who are excellent at farcical monkeyshines, have very little to go on. Mme. Matzenauer in her first appearance off the operatic stage, showed the gusto and force of good farce playing, but her part is a feolish irrelevance. Frank Conlan is similarly handicapped, but obliges with an amusingly goofy performance, and there is a funny sketch of a soldier by an actor set down in the playbill as Red Buttons.

He could find, I should think, a better'ole.

"Vickie"

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
September 23, 1942

A Good Idea For Someone Else

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

VICKIE could have been just what the doctor ordered, only they filled the prescription all wrong. There's a likely comedy, right now, in poking good-humored but witty fun at our women warriors. Given time, there may be one yet. But *Vickie* is just a loud, sprawling and tasteless farce, rife with machine-made gags and rampant with machine-gun shenanigans, directed with very little drive and acted, for the most part, with very little skill.

It concerns the home life (or what is left of it) of a young couple after the wife has become a consecrated members of the AWCS, a fortunately non-existent rival of the AWVS. The last of Vickie's crimes against domesticity are that she gives George's best clothes away and makes a first-aid martyr of him. Her commander, a battle woman of the most relentless order, descends upon the household and turns it into a smoking ruin. She quarters soldiers in it for the week end, causes the cook to quit, replaces her with a refugee opera singer, uses George's engineering blueprints to wrap sandwiches in; and when a bigwig comes from Washington to look the blueprints over, decides he is a spy and has him trussed up and flung into a cupboard.

* * *

This is not all that happens by a long shot, but these random memories will indicate the nature and noisiness of Mr. Herzig's satire, which is just old horseplay in new uniforms. Unhappily, in addition to being ponderous, the whole thing is not very pertinent. The AWCS bears too little resemblance to even the most militant or misguided of our women patriots for Mr. Herzig to raise any laughs by striking home. The subject, to begin with, is probably better adapted to comedy than to farce. But *Vickie's* gags are not much superior to its guerilla warfare; they just keep coming, as though turned out on a belt, and only occasionally are funny. *Vickie* will have to wait until it's made into a movie, with a brand new script, before it really comes to life.

Uta Hagen is hardly suited to farce, and as Vickie is certainly not helped by her role. Wherever possible, Jose Ferrer does well as the hard tried husband, and Mme. Margaret Matzenauer warbles away lustily as the operatic cook. The rest of the cast, little helped by the show, does little for it in return.

'VICKIE'

A farce in three acts by S. M. Herzig; staged by Jose Ferrer and Frank Mandel; setting by Ernest Glover; presented at the Plymouth Theater by Mr. Mandel on September 22, 1942. The cast:

Vickie Roberts	Uta Hagen
George Roberts	Jose Ferrer
Mr. Dunne	Taylor Holmes
Blanche	Evelyn Davis
Mr. Noonan	Frank Conlan
Mrs. Dunne	Mildred Dunnock
Amy	Collette Lyons
Private Cootes	Edmund Glover
Private Carter	Red Buttons
Karen	Gerry Carr
Sandra	Lynne Carter
Greta	Mme. Margaret Matzenauer
Taxi Driver	George Spelvin
Kay Hackett	Wynne Bose
Mr. Corliss	Charles Halton
Mrs. Frye	Eleanor Gifford
Mrs. Arthur	Marcella Markham
Mr. Hatch	Del Hughes
Mrs. Corliss	Sara Seegar

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
September 23, 1942

AWCS and EGS

By HOWARD BARNES

WOMEN in uniform are given a good-natured and amusing ribbing in "Vickie." From practicing first aid to capturing a supposed spy, they cavort exuberantly through S. M. Herzig's farce at the Plymouth. Since their antics are never treated with downright malice, they should not offend even a feminine lieutenant. Since they have been sprung into a slapstick pattern and are handled boisterously by a competent company, they should find favor with those who fancy escapist entertainment with contemporary seasoning.

* * *

As a straight job of dramatic carpentering "Vickie" leaves much to be desired. The author betrays his background of Hollywood writing at nearly every turn in the burlesque. There is nothing subtle about this account of meddling females in a military mood. When the situations get really snarled up farcically a bit of Mack Sennett hoopla suffices to bring down a curtain. When the conversational set-tos between the ladies in Sam Browne belts and several long-suffering males become wearisome, a bit of arrant stage business serves to sustain laughter. Of one thing you can be certain. "Vickie" is a natural for eventual screen translation.

Thanks to smartly paced staging and clever clowning it is good fun for most of the time at the Plymouth. The scene in which the AWCS (American Women's Camp Service) and the EGS (Emergency Godmothers) leap on an unsuspecting dollar-a-year man in the belief that he is an enemy agent is a helter-skelter piece of slapstick, but it is hilarious. The internal feuds of the AWCS have moments of bright satire and the reactions of an assortment of males, in uniforms and civilian clothes, are almost always beguiling. With more dramatic craftsmanship, "Vickie" might have been a good comedy as well as an amusing show.

* * *

While it is the women who dominate the action of the lampoon, it is the acting of Jose Ferrer which gives the work its chief distinction. Without too much bright material at hand, he succeeds in distilling laughter out of every cock-eyed scene. His humor is broad, but it is infectious. His portrait of a bedevilled engineer, whose domestic peace is disrupted by the girls in uniform, is the one straight line of comedy running through the proceedings. Here is an actor who knows how to pack a line or a bit of pantomime full of fun. It is good to have him on Broadway again.

* * *

It is good, too to have Charles Halton back from the movies, contributing an acidulous performance as the outraged dollar a year man. Uta Hagen, who is Mrs. Ferrer in private life, supports him pleasantly in the part of the young wife who turns over her home to AWCS and EGS, while Mildred Dunnock is first-rate as the daffy leader of the lady troopers. Then there are nice burlesque portrayals by Mme. Margaret Matzenauer, as a refugee cook who can't forget the opera, by Red Buttons, as a soldier on leave and by Frank Conlan, as a former flagpole sitter who turns airplane spotter. "Vickie" is a contrived but amiable farce. While it is no great ornament to the new season, it adds up to a moderately satisfying show.

NEW YORK TIMES
September 23, 1942

S. M. Herzig's 'Vickie' Makes a Farce of the War-Making of Women in Volunteer Uniforms

By BROOKS ATKINSON

NEARLY every one at the Plymouth Theatre last evening seemed to be happily roaring at "Vickie." For S. M. Herzig, a writer of sketches for musical shows and a Hollywood wordman, has gone loudly into the vagaries of civilian war work, with special emphasis upon the vertigo of women in amateur uniforms. Being an honest sort of chap, Mr. Herzig describes his play as a farce, and José Ferrer and Frank Mandel have staged it with the energetic confusion of a circus. Since most of the audience seemed genuinely to be having a good time, it would probably be wise to discount the peevishness of this department this morning. Nevertheless, there is not the slightest doubt that this department regards "Vickie" as an undistinguished, heavy-handed romp which operates at about the same rolling speed as "Charley's Aunt."

* * *

Somewhere in the suburbs of New York City, Mr. Herzig has discovered an attractive young married couple, the husband being busily engaged inventing an important war machine, the wife being up to her neck in the ravishing blue uniform of a woman's voluntary organization—chief rival of the A. W. V. S., in case you are nosey. On the balcony outside their apartment an aging plane-spotter keeps vigil.

The purpose of "Vickie" is to show how the over-stimulation of war work drives the women wacky and very nearly results in the sabotage of an important war machine. When a representative of WPB comes to look over the plans and the model, the women mistake him for a spy and almost demolish him. Straightening him out keeps "Vickie" going at high speed until exactly 11 P. M.

* * *

What with first-aid courses, sandwich making and high-pressure hospitality for soldiers, Mr. Herzig has a fruitful topic for a madcap piece of satire. But he is a literal-minded workman, and he has succeeded in writing a farce that has nothing but breathless situations and hardly one humorous line. When one of the women, excited by the sight of a man who actually has been knocked out, screams: "Shall we use artificial respiration?" the jaded husband shouts, "Good Lord, not on a sick man!" Put that down as a sound comment on the reliability of the graduates of first-aid classes. But that is probably the wittiest moment in "Vickie." Mr. Herzig's general notion of humor is to hit a play over the head with a long-handled shovel.

* * *

It is to be feared that the direction is also physical. Although it is healthy, it is exhausting. Mr. Ferrer and Uta Hagen play the young married couple. During their amorous scenes it is comforting to remember that they are married off stage as well as on, and that the romance of "Vickie" goes through their entire lives. Mr. Ferrer is the comedian of the family. Miss Hagen is more the romantic, dramatic type. In her big farcical scene she acts like a talented college girl.

The cast includes Charles Halton, as a big business man with a nervous stomach; Taylor Holmes, as the giggling husband of a uniformed commander; Frank Conlan, as an unsteady airplane spotter; Collette Lyons, as a volunteer who does not know where to stop; Mildred Dunnock, as a severe leader of good causes; Mme. Margaret Matzenauer, as a corpulent, operatic cook, and some other working players. Ernest Glover has designed a competent set. Most of the people in the first-night audience seemed to think that "Vickie" was a scream. To this austere department it looked like the work of willing amateurs.